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Guest editorial to Nordic ped number: Challenging the Genre

by

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In talking about academic knowledge it is not unusual to find those who either support or attack the Mode I and Mode II distinction proposed by Gibbon et al., (1994). In the former, knowledge is academic homogeneous, hierarchal and organized according to disciplinary boundaries. In the latter, it is heterogeneous, transdisciplinary and draws upon work undertaken in sites outside of the traditional ivory tower, such as in technology and industry driven milieus. Why this change in conception, not always backed up by the dissolving of disciplinary boundaries, as Mode II seems to implicate? Explanations differ and some have argued that they reflect the opportunism of scientists seeking funding and the opportunism of policy makers seeking to solve specific problems (Weingart, 2000: 39-40). In slightly different terms it may be that we are talking about metaphors of knowledge that different actors more or less use to direct and legitimate their endeavours:

Over the course of this century, metaphors of knowledge have shifted from the static logic of a foundation and a structure to the dynamic properties of a network, a web, a system, and a field. Perceptions of academic reality, though, are still shaped by older forms and images. Simplified views of the complex university only add to the problem of operational realities that outrun old expectations, especially older definitions that depict one part or function of the university as its 'essence' (Klein, 2000: 21).

While acknowledging issues such as these this special number entitled 'challenging the genre' has a more specific and local origin. The guest editors (Dobson and Steinnes) were respectively first and second opponents in a Norwegian doctoral disputation in education in June 2007. We examined and passed a radical doctorate. The doctorate was for the doctor polit. degree, where the candidate broke with accepted tradition: research questions were not presented at the beginning of the dissertation; many forms of writing were present in the dissertation, such as autobiographical, academic and quotations from informant interviews. It set us thinking.

What is this object we call the academic dissertation/treatise? Is it under threat from a number of new innovations: the PhD by publication, the professional doctorate and so on? And, is it threatened from within, from new perspectives on language, cognition and meaning, coming from philosophical or poststructuralist approaches towards many different academic fields of research, education included? How should we consider questions of genre when considering different academic texts, such as the treatise, the essay, the article and the disputation and its accompanying disputation or *viva voce*?

Most of the Nordic countries have had or are in the process of having debates about what is a doctorate. Norway to take an example, commissioned a report to the National University and College board on future doctorate models. The spectre of low or slow completion rates is present, not to mention the tension that exists between writing a doctoral dissertation vs. the PhD by publication, based upon a number of published journal articles and an unpublished introductory essay. The latter is more normal in the natural sciences and the former in the human/social sciences.

These questions encompass many layers and dimensions. They concern both political issues related to recent reforms of higher education institutions and issues of a scientific, philosophical and academic character. They concern ideology, questions of value and ethics, and some basic questions on the nature of the philosophy of science. And the role of different histories, within and between disciplines, plays an important role along with that of genres.

In this special edition, commissioned by the lead editor of the journal, we have invited researchers and academics to participate in some of the ongoing debates on these issues. The focus for some is on the situation in Scandinavia, while for others a more internationally oriented approach has been chosen. The contribution by Peters and Patel, both based in U.S.A. is a case of the latter and we have chosen it to open this guest number.

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